UNITED NATIONS

World Chronicle

PROGRAMME: No. 676, recorded 19 September 1997

GUEST: **Amb. Ahmad Kamal**
Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations

JOURNALISTS: Ian Williams, *Tribune* (London)
Judy Lessing, Radio New Zealand

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs)

Hundreds of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) accredited to the United Nations recently held their 50th annual meeting at UN headquarters in New york. Ambassador Ahmad Kamal, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, who currently chairs two United Nations working groups, one on non-governmental organizations and the other on informatics, discusses several issues – the work of NGOs, informatics and UN reform.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration: 28:00″
Executive Producer: Kamil Taha
Director: Livingston Hinckley
Production Assistant: Ellen McGuffie

ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

As the United Nations strives to face ever-increasing global challenges, it has found a group of allies willing to work with it in a new partnership. These allies are the non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, which recently concluded their 50th annual conference at the United Nations in New York. What are the NGOs doing? And why is their work important for the United Nations?

Our guest today is in a unique position to discuss a number of diverse issues vital to the work of the United Nations, such as the relationship between the world organization and the NGOs, the modern field of informatics, and UN reform. He is Ambassador Ahmad Kamal of Pakistan, current chairman of two United Nations working groups, one on non-governmental organizations, the other on informatics. Joining me to talk with Ambassador Kamal are Ian Williams of the *Tribune* of London and Judy Lessing of Radio New Zealand.

Ambassador Kamal, welcome to World Chronicle.

AMB. KAMAL: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, looking at the list of participants in the recent conference to which we referred in the introduction, I saw that the National Rifle Association was one, and the Heritage Foundation, which has made something of a cottage industry out of attacking the United Nations, was another. What are the criteria for non-governmental organizations to receive accreditation?

AMB. KAMAL: Well, in order to be accredited through the ECOSOC system –

LITTLEJOHNS: The Economic and Social Council.

AMB. KAMAL: – the Economic and Social Council – an NGO must have a statute; it must have a clearly identified list of members; it must be able to file its funding procedures; and it must have a sphere of action which falls within the interests and activities of the United Nations. Within these parameters there is great flexibility and freedom. You go through a process which lasts about a year for examination and, by and large, unless you are a very nasty person or organization, you – and if you are reasonably convinced, and if you have been reasonably active, the chances are that you will get accreditation.

LITTLEJOHNS: Of course, some people think that the National Rifle Association might fall into that category. I won't say they're nasty, but they certainly are rather controversial, to put it mildly.

AMB. KAMAL: Yes, but freedom of opinion is important, and just because their opinions do not coincide with ours is not a reason for filtering them or anybody else out of the procedures.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ted Turner, the media tycoon, has just announced that he is going to contribute $1 billion dollars over 10 years to the United Nations at the rate of $100 million a year, which presumably will have to be done through a foundation because the UN cannot receive contributions from individuals. Does that mean that this will become an NGO, would you think?

AMB. KAMAL: No. This is a different problem altogether. One of the major – you know that the United Nations is going through a period of self-examination and reform. The reason for that reform is essentially that this is an organization that was set up in 1945, that is 50 years ago, and the world has changed a lot in those 50 years. Much of the problems of the United Nations relate to the fact that the basic principles and precepts which were enunciated in 1945 are no longer valid in 1997. Now, that readjustment is a difficult readjustment, and we can go into it when we talk about reform. But in this – to answer your question here, one of the problems of reform is that new actors have appeared on the scene who did not exist in 1945 or did not exist to the same degree as they exist today.

LITTLEJOHNS: Namely, the NGOs?

AMB. KAMAL: NGOs are one, or civil society in the larger context, that is to say non-governmental organizations, think tanks, academia. They all existed in 1945, but they did not exist with the same intensity, nor with the same range of action as they have in today's world. There is a fundamental reason for that. The fundamental reason is that the UN Charter starts with the words "We, the peoples". In 1945, "We, the peoples" were to be represented by Governments and Governments alone, because all Governments were adequate or adequately representative of the aspirations and range of action of "We, the peoples". That's no longer true today, because the peoples referred to in the Charter have decided to take matters in their own hands in several areas and have set up organizations – they are community organizations, they are academic think tanks – who are overtaking, in many places, the thinking, the decision-making and the action process of Governments. That is what makes non-governmental organizations a full fledged actor and an unstoppable force in multilateralism.

LITTLEJOHNS: But they're still sort of second class citizens in the UN system, aren't they? I mean, Governments of course have the first priority. I mean, how important is the contribution of NGOs to the UN system?

AMB. KAMAL: It is vitally important. The NGOs are by and large the only organizations which are present in the field. You take the High Commission for Refugees – I

have the honour to chair the executive board of that organization – the budget was $1.2 billion; 80 per cent of that budget was being disbursed in the field through non-governmental organizations because they're the only ones who have an actual presence at the grassroots level. The same is true of other institutions. UNDP, the Development Programme, is increasingly dependent on non-governmental organizations for extension at grassroots level in-country programmes. So we just have to adjust to this phenomenon.

Now, your other question was why should Governments agree? And that is true. That is the agony of the process. Because you have King Canute on one side who says the Charter says only Governments are representatives and I am Government; and in front you have the NGOs which are like a tide coming forward. And there is no doubt that the numbers of NGOs are growing: even in a small country like Nepal you have 10,000 registered NGOs.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ten thousand?

AMB. KAMAL: Ten thousand in Nepal. So it's a tide. The question is, do you adjust to the tide? Do you try to manage the tide? Or do you sit on the beach and say, no, the tide must stop? I think history will tell whether we, as Governments, are intelligent enough and whether we have enough foresight to understand the importance of this tidal flow. And what is required, if we recognize that it is a tide, then what is required is to create a consensus as to how it is to be managed and how it can be best used for the objectives of the Charter and for the aspirations of the peoples, because ultimately all of us, you and I, belong to a single world in a global village, and whatever we do and whatever we aspire to as individuals in different corners of the world impacts on each other.

WILLIAMS: I was born and brought up in a seaport, and I remember the tide brought some very funny stuff in sometimes. And some very odd things were left on the beach afterwards. And I think one of the problems possibly with the NGOs is that by giving indiscriminate franchise to NGOs you're letting in not just sort of strange people – like the Heritage Foundation or the National Rifle Association – but over the last few years one of the phenomena we've noticed here in the UN is that you have sort of spurious green NGOs, for example, that have wonderful green-sounding titles, claiming to be speaking on behalf of the environment and the atmosphere, and when you check their funders it happens to be the big chemical companies or the big energy companies. And amazingly enough they independently decide there's no such thing as global warming, and it's perfectly all right to carry on, and it would be destructive if you tried to stop economies growing by restricting carbon dioxide outputs. So, the point about NGOs is, who selects them? Governments, in many cases, and fortunately in an increasing number of cases, are elected by their peoples,

but NGOs are self-selecting. And how can you make that balance between allowing freedom of expression and just asking who these people represent?

LITTLEJOHNS: What's the question?

WILLIAMS: That was it. How do you represent, how do you make that balance between who these people represent and allowing freedom of opinion?

AMB. KAMAL: I would put – I could easily throw the question back at you. Because you say "Who selects them?" And I could ask you, "Who censors them?" or "Who filters them?" And you will find that it is just as difficult to answer the one question as the other. The point is that in society you do not have a filtration system which says that only the good will vote in a national election and the bad will not vote, because that selection process presupposes that you are appointing yourself as God. And that, unfortunately, is not possible. So you allow democracy to find its own level. In the question of the NGO, there's no doubt, the NGOs know it, you know it, and I know it, that there are good NGOs and there are bad NGOs, but the price to be paid for democracy is that we take the good with the bad and allow the process over a period of time to filter out the bad through its internal processes. The filtration of the bad NGOs from the good NGOs is not the job of Governments, it is the job of the NGOs themselves, or it is the job of the society from which those NGOs emanate. We should not try to put barriers in front of a force which, after all, emanates from the people. And difference of opinion is the essence of democracy, and just because my opinions are mine does not mean that I can filter you out because your opinions do not correspond to mine.

WILLIAMS: But when you have a conference, as we did in New York, your 10,000 NGOs in Nepal are highly unlikely to be able to afford the air fare and sustenance to send delegations to New York, whereas the Heritage Foundation could actually send someone to Nepal but have no difficulty giving them a subway token to come across New York. And so there's a sort of self-filtering process here that NGOs, affluent NGOs with affluent backers can be represented at these conferences, and poor NGOs, especially from the developing countries, will find it very difficult. Is there any way to redress that balance?

AMB. KAMAL: This is a major problem. It's an identified problem. This is what is called the North-South divide on NGOs, which is that northern NGOs have an in-built advantage in making their voice felt easier, because conferences are here, they have more money, they can post regular people here. Now, we have to solve the problem. And this is something that has to be addressed. Because you need geographical balance, you need intellectual balance. There must be some balance between people who do not agree with each other. Because if all of us agree with each other, then we are condemned to be earthworms. A difference of opinion is important. So I – this point of yours I take fully, and

it is a point that we are trying to address, which is how to give some help which will equate the ability of the poorer NGOs to have their opinions felt as strongly as the richer NGOs. And that is why informatics becomes important, because it's an equalizer which levels the playing field.

LESSING: I would like to go back to something you said. You said how to manage the tide of NGOs is one of the central questions the UN has to deal with. What ideas do you have?

AMB. KAMAL: When we went through this for the first time – you know that we've had about a dozen global conferences, and the question of NGOs and the ability of NGOs to contribute has been vividly demonstrated during these global conferences. In the first one there were just a few hundred; in the last one there were several thousand NGOs which participated, and their participation by and large was useful. Now, when we went into the Human Rights Conference in Vienna, for the first time we had to deal with a very large number of NGOs who were interested. And they wanted access. And the question was, if you give 2,000 or 3,000 NGOs access, the 185 countries are going to get submerged because they will take all the time, there are not enough chairs, there's not enough printing capacity to be able to process 3,000 documents, it's easier to process 185 documents. And faced with this problem, we asked the NGOs, we said, look, we can give you 10 chairs and two hours to present your point of view. Will you be able to consult among yourselves, designate your own representatives? You will have access, but since access – you cannot be allowed to submerge Governments, therefore it has to be limited, it will be managed access. The NGOs were able, without any difficulty, to designate their own representatives – the figures that I've given are not the actual figures – but they were able to designate their own representatives; they came; they spoke in the allocated amount of time; and I think their views helped the global conference in Vienna understand how society, civil society at large saw the problem of human rights.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Ambassador Ahmad Kamal, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations. Judy, you have another question?

LESSING: Yes, I do. I really would like to know exactly what you mean by informatics, because if somebody asked me to define informatics I couldn't.

AMB. KAMAL: Well, it's a catchy word, and it shows that you're interested, which was the objective when we used that for the first time a few years ago. The idea of informatics, once again, if we can jump back for a minute into the new actors, there are three new actors who have appeared on the scene since 1945. We've already spoken about non-governmental organizations, or civil society. The second visible new actor is the private

sector. The private sector existed in 1945, but it had nowhere near the type of importance that it has today, because today the private sector is moving more than $1 trillion a day across borders, without passports, without visas and without permissions. Now, this means that the concept of the border, which is one of the fundamental ideas of the Charter, has been breached, because porosity has been introduced into it by the emergence of the private sector. We have to come to terms with it. We haven't quite started that examination. But the news to which reference was made earlier of $1 billion coming from a private sector individual like Ted Turner is the shape of things to come, and this building will have to adjust to inputs of that type in which Mr. Ted Turner is quite obviously a pioneer.

The third actor on the scene is informatics, which is information technology, which is the Internet, which is connectivity, which is the fact that for the first time since – I mean, in one of the milestones of history you had the wheel; you had the moveable type; you had the concept of the democratization of information and the pocketbook; and now you have Internet, which is information databases which cannot be controlled and which are accessible to all. So the key to informatics and the Internet lies in the non-controllability of that information, that it cannot be filtered, it cannot be censored, and it is accessible to all. Our job in what we are trying to do in the United Nations is to make that accessible to all, to show people that the basic requirement in hardware and software and training is very feasible, and that if you have it for the first time in history you have equal access to information and a level playing field. Thus, informatics is again one of the most important aspects of reform on which the United Nations is working currently. Because it's a force multiplier, it's more than a tool, it's an actor in its own right at the service of development. And for the first time, if it can be mastered, then it gives you an ability to handle developmental issues on an equal and equitable basis.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Kamal, you're speaking about reform. This is the sort of flavour of the month, or the flavour of the year, in fact. How is this reform process going to move along? Is the Security Council going to be reformed with new permanent members? How are these reforms going to be carried out?

KAMAL: Well, reform is very much in the air; we used to talk about spring being in the air. And you see a certain stirring in the loins because of reform, which is obviously preoccupying everybody. The need for reform arises basically because of the fact that 50 years or 52 years have passed. There is a questioning as to whether the original consensus on which the United Nations was based is still holding or whether it was just kept alive by the cold war, which came three years after the establishment of the UN, and perhaps had the cold war not occurred the questions of reform that we are asking today may have been asked as early as 1950. The fact of the matter is that the cold war is over and we are now faced

with a brand new situation with one sole surviving super-Power and an organization which has multiplied from its original 51 members to 185 members. All this requires an adjustment – new actors, we've listed three of them. Now, in this reform, we went through – we suddenly realized about two years ago that we had hit 50, and it was a sort of –

LITTLEJOHNS: Fifty years of age.

KAMAL: Yes. And it was a mid-life crisis for the United Nations. And people suddenly said, hey, we're 50, we've got to do something about it. And we started this process of examining reform through working groups. Five of them were set up: Agenda for Peace, Agenda for Development, Financial Situation, Strengthening of the UN, and Reform of the Security Council. By and large, those five working groups were unable to deliver anything of substantive impact. And so this year the Secretary-General has overtaken that, he has come out with his own reform proposals, so there is no doubt that this year's flavour in the General Assembly is going to be a discussion of reform which does not mean expansion of the permanent membership of the Security Council, it means reforming the United Nations, redefining its objectives, creating a new consensus about those objectives, and finding out how those objectives can best be implemented.

WILLIAMS: I'm thinking, back in 1945 we had the Second World War which created the almost unique conditions to allow the UN Charter to be passed. In fact, recently I was at a lunch with a group of ambassadors, many of whom felt – I think next year is the 50th anniversary of the International Declaration of Human Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and most of them felt that any rewritten document would be worse than the existing one, under present circumstances. Do you think we can seriously reform the UN without world war III, and is that price worth paying?

KAMAL: There are different types of world war III's. You don't actually have to find a world war to reach a crisis. You can reach a crisis quite easily if you run out of money. That is also a world war III situation. And we almost are close to that, because one very major contributor is not paying its debt. There's $1.2 billion owed by a single country.

WILLIAMS: So that comes to my other point of reforms. Reform, when we hear it in Washington and New York, often sounds like cuts – the two are synonymous; whereas many people in the South think the UN possibly should be even expanding to meet the new challenges of growing population, growing congestion.

KAMAL: Of course. We know that the United Nations was based on two pillars – there's peace and security, and there's economic and social development. In peace and security – in both – there have been some successes and there have been many failures. In peace and security the shadow of Somalia, of Srebrenica, of Rwanda, is going to sit very heavily on the history of the United Nations as it is written 50 years down the line. In

economic and social development there is no doubt that the gap has doubled in the last 30 years. So these are sad facts, and we've got to do something about them. Now, reform is not downsizing, which some people hope it will become. What we need is to use the existing resources of the United Nations, in energy and manpower and programmes, to more telling effect, in other words, to make this a more efficient organization with better productivity and better output. Now, that reform requires going deep into objectives, because you cannot reform personnel without being clear about objectives – this is MBO, management by objectives. We are not quite sure as to what is the objective. Do we still agree that we need – that development, or the alleviation of abject poverty, is an important objective of the United Nations? Or is this going to become merely a fire brigade where only the biggest fire is then put out and the others we turn our faces away from? There are disputes in the United Nations which go back 50 years which this organization has not been able to resolve, on which it has not been able to implement its own resolutions. Now, in that type of situation you need a redefinition of objectives. I agree with you that 1945 was a very unusual year: it was the end of a world war; there were clear victors and clear vanquished. To the victors the spoils – in this case, the victors abrogated to themselves the spoils. They were not able to have a consensus on that even in 1945. The question of the veto had to go to the vote, and out of 51 members, only 20 agreed with the veto; 31 either abstained or voted against. So we did not have a consensus on this concept of permanent membership. And there can be no such – one can adjust to reality by saying that you cannot have an organization which works against the biggest Powers in the world. That is true, that is reality. But you cannot at the same time say that in a world which for the past 200 or 300 years has been moving from aristocracy towards democracy that we should continue to have a hereditary aristocracy which cannot be questioned at all. The history of the world is the history of the breaching of the privilege of the aristocracy. That is the Magna Carta; that is the Bill of Rights; that's the Declaration of Independence. And that is what is going to happen in the United Nations. The fact that you have it written in the Charter or that it requires the votes of the aristocracy itself for any change is an unhappy situation which we will breach, because history tells us that we breach such things.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, I'm afraid that we're practically out of time, and I apologize to our colleague here, Judy, who really got in only a couple of brief questions, but unfortunately that's the way these things go. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been ambassador Ahmad Kamal, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations. He was interviewed by Ian Williams of the *Tribune* of London and Judy Lessing of Radio New Zealand.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

* * * * *

Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827, New York, New York, 10017, USA.

World Chronicle is broadcast worldwide and features guests whose work is concerned with major global issues. This programme is a public affairs presentation of this station from United Nations Radio and Television.

Additional information material about the United Nations can be obtained by writing to the Public Inquiries Unit, United Nations, Room GA-57, New York, New York, 10017, USA, or the UN Information Centre in your country.